

VOLUME 18, NO. 8

AUGUST 1973

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

- CRIME BUFF by James H. Schmitz..... 138

SHORT STORIES

DEADLY AUGUST by Clark Howard.....	2
BREAKING POINT by Michael Zuroy	19
LOST AND FOUND by James Michael Ullman.....	30
THE FIRE FLOWER by Vincent McConnor	38
►BUT DON'T TELL YOUR MOTHER by Jack Ritchie.....	53
FAIR GAME by C. B. Gilford.....	58
KING OF THE WORLD by John Lutz	70
THE TIP-OFF by Talmage Powell.....	88
LOADED QUEST by Thomasina Weber	100
FOR AULD LANG SYNE by Theodore Mathieson	104
ADAM'S LIB by Edward Wellen	121
GREEN THUMBS AND TRIGGER FINGERS by Donald Olson.....	124

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 18, No. 8, Aug. 1973. Single copies 75 cents. Subscriptions \$9.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$10.00 (in U.S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 784 U.S. 1, Suite 6, North Palm Beach, Fla. 33408. Copyright H. S. D. Publications, Inc., 1973. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright convention. Title registered U.S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited material. Manuscripts and changes of address should be sent to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 784 U.S. 1, Suite 6, North Palm Beach, Fla. 33408. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

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Nowadays it seems just about anything can be picked up at the supermarket.

But Don't Tell Your Mother

I regarded the tools leaning against the shed wall. Should I take the pick mattock too? Perhaps the ground would be too hard for simple digging.

My eleven-year-old daughter, Cindy, appeared in the open doorway.

I was a bit startled. I thought she had gone down to the village to see her grandmother and wouldn't be back for at least three or four hours.

"What are you looking for?" Cindy asked.

"A shovel."

"Why?"

"I'm going to dig an asparagus bed."

"Why don't you use the spade?" she said. "That's better for digging. Shovels are for scooping up."

I picked up the spade.

Cindy frowned thoughtfully.



by Jack Ritchie

"On the other hand, that pointy shovel there could also be used for digging. It's called an irrigating shovel. I learned that at Girl Scouts."

I picked up the pointy shovel too. "I thought you were going to see your grandmother?"

She shrugged. "It's a long bike ride and it's pretty hot today."

"Your grandmother will be disappointed if you don't see her at least once this week." I shifted the tools to one hand and ex-

tracted some change from my pocket. "Maybe a cool soda will help you get to the village." Automatically I added, "But don't tell your mother."

"I won't," she agreed happily. She was about to leave, but then hesitated. "Where is Mother?"

"At the moment, I'm not quite certain. All I know is that she is gone."

"Why didn't she take the car?"

"There's something wrong with the muffler. One of her friends picked her up."

I watched Cindy mount her bicycle and coast down our driveway to the road. She braked to a stop, as she'd always been instructed to do, and then proceeded left on the highway toward the village.

I went to my car parked in the driveway and tested the trunk latch again. Yes, it was still locked. Rather a tricky thing, that lock; sometimes it worked perfectly, but other times it would spring open and leave the trunk lid ajar an inch or two.

I put the shovel, the spade, and the mattock on the rear seat of the car and slid behind the wheel. I edged the car off the gravel driveway onto our back lawn and drove slowly up the hill to the woods, some one hundred yards above.

I had walked up here earlier and knew that there was just enough clearance to maneuver a car about fifty feet into the grove.

I parked the car, got out, and surveyed the site I had selected previously.

What should be the dimensions of this particular hole? What was traditional? Seven-by-four, and six feet deep?

I thought that six-by-three should be sufficient. After all, I didn't have to deal with a coffin.

Using the irrigating shovel, I began digging. I am not much for physical labor and so I paused frequently to rest. After some forty minutes, I noticed that blisters appeared to be forming on the palms of my hands. That would never do. I could see at least another two hours of work ahead of me and I did not wish to be hampered by blisters.

I decided to go back to the house to see if I could find some work gloves.

As I emerged from the woods, I paused to let my eyes adjust to the sunlight. Yes, from this point one had quite a panoramic view of the entire village. One could make out almost every individual building within its borders: the town hall, the bank, the supermarket with its parking lot. My wife Marian's parents still occu-

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pied that green-roofed house three doors from the church.

How long had Marian and I been married? Thirteen years? Something like that.

A stormy marriage? That was too strong a word—but Marian did have a temper which she used frequently.

I walked down to the house and found a pair of canvas work gloves in the basement.

The phone rang just as I was about to leave the house. I picked up the wall receiver.

"Is Marian there?" the voice asked.

It was Mrs. Walker, who lived half a mile down the road.

"No," I said. "My wife isn't home."

"Could she be over at her folks' house?"

"She didn't mention going anywhere in particular when she left."

I thought Mrs. Walker would hang up, but she said, "Have you heard the latest?"

"About what?"

Mrs. Walker's voice turned slightly snappish. "About the bank robbery this morning, of course. There were *two* witnesses."

"Really? I thought there were half a dozen or more."

"I mean two people who actually *saw* this robber without his

mask on. Can you imagine that!"

I dropped one of my gloves. I picked it up.

"After he held up the bank," Mrs. Walker said, "he ran into the alley and took off his mask. I guess he figured that it might be too suspicious to run around with one on."

"Who are the witnesses?"

"Strangers in town. They were just passing through and they stopped off for a bite. They saw this man running down the alley pulling off his mask and they got a real good look at his face."

"Where are these witnesses now?"

"The sheriff took them up to the state capital. They're going to look at pictures of criminals. They're called mug shots, you know. But suppose the robber doesn't have a record?"

"In that case, I don't imagine they'll find his picture in the files."

She sighed. "He got away with \$50,000."

Actually it was \$48,280.

When Mrs. Walker hung up, I walked back up the hill and resumed digging. The gloves eased my hands considerably.

How does one go about spending \$48,280? One can travel, of course, if not burdened excessively by responsibilities.

Or would it be worthwhile moving entirely—pulling up roots—to find a place where one could safely spend that much money without attracting too much attention?

No. I didn't think so.

It seemed to me wiser, more intelligent, to remain where one was and spend the money judiciously. What an incredible difference it could make to one's happiness and temperament just to add an inconspicuous three or four thousand extra dollars a year to one's income.

I decided to stop digging at five feet. That seemed quite deep enough.

I went to the rear of the car and tried the key in the trunk lock. I had the usual difficulty, but finally the trunk opened.

I regarded the body distastefully. It was going to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Rigor mortis seemed to have set in and the body was somewhat wedged into place.

It was nearly four o'clock when I finished filling in. I smoothed the ground over the grave and then covered the bare spot with leaves. One could not particularly distinguish it from any other point on the forest floor.

I put the tools into the car trunk and then backed out of the

woods. I drove back to my driveway.

Inside the house I washed up and changed my clothes. I had just finished when Cindy came back home.

"Is Mother home yet?"

"No."

"Did you know that there were two eyewitnesses to the robbery who actually *saw* the robber without his mask on?"

"Yes, I heard about it."

"The sheriff took them to the capital this afternoon to look at mug shots and they *identified* the robber."

I stared at her for a moment.

"They picked out somebody named Tony Brannigan. I remember the name Brannigan because there's a Polly Brannigan in my class, but she's no relation. He's got a record of arrests *this* long." She indicated just how long with her hands. "Did you dig the asparagus patch?"

"I changed my mind."

"What's for supper?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"But I'm hungry."

I sighed. "All right. There are some chocolate cookies in one of the kitchen cabinets."

She smiled. "But don't tell Mother?"

She got the cookies and went up to her room to listen to

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ear-splitting rock-and-roll records.

I saw a light-blue sedan stop at the foot of our driveway.

I went into the kitchen and began making drinks. After a minute or so, I heard the front door open.

My wife Marian walked into the kitchen. "Is it done?"

"Yes," I said. "It's done."

She took off her coat. "It isn't as though we killed him."

"No."

That morning at ten-thirty, Marian and I had been shopping at the supermarket when we heard the sirens responding to the bank robbery.

We, along with hundreds of others, had watched the various local and state police officers fan out into the neighborhood looking for the thief.

After a while, we put our groceries into the back seat of the car and drove home.

In our driveway, when I opened the trunk to unload the garden hose I'd purchased earlier, we had found the body of the man I now knew was named Tony Brannigan—and beside him lay the bag containing the \$48,280.

Apparently Brannigan, fleeing from the bank, had turned into the supermarket parking lot. He had seen the trunk lid of my parked car slightly open and, in

his moment of desperation, he'd crawled inside and pulled down the lid. Perhaps it had been his intention to remain quietly hidden there until the opportunity came for him to leave safely; but Marian and I had driven the car out of the lot, and Brannigan, still crouched inside the trunk, had died.

It could have been a heart attack, suffocation, or carbon monoxide. I suspected the latter, since Brannigan's face was a rather violent red.

"The money is probably insured," Marian said. "I mean, we're not really hurting anybody by keeping it, are we?"

"No."

She sipped the drink I handed her. "I promised to drop in at Mother's to set her hair."

I issued a warning. "But remember, this is *our* little secret. Yours and mine. *Don't tell your mother.*"

She sighed. "I know. But I've always told her *everything* before and I'm going to feel terribly guilty."

I drove her to her mother's house and then dropped in at Len's garage.

A faulty muffler can be a dangerous thing, especially if you're riding in the trunk.